

March 29, 2018

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write to express our opposition to your proposal to drastically cut the critical Lifeline program that has successfully provided phone and internet services to individuals who might otherwise not be able to access them. We ask that you reconsider your plan to deprive critical Lifeline support from 8 million otherwise eligible Americans.

It is your obligation to the American public, as the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, to improve the Lifeline program and ensure that more Americans can afford access, and have means of access, to broadband and phone service. Your proposal accomplishes the exact opposite – it takes resources out of the hands of the most vulnerable Americans.

The Lifeline Program is essential for millions of Americans who rely on subsidized internet access to find jobs, schedule doctor's appointments, complete their school assignments, interface with the government, and remain connected in a digital economy. The program helps Americans—including disproportionate numbers of families with children, veterans and people of color—survive.

The majority of Lifeline's recipients, at least 6.5 million Americans, use the program to receive internet service. From an economic standpoint, it is unclear why the FCC would spend billions of dollars to expand access to broadband while at the same time make Lifeline less accessible to those who need it most. Your proposal impacts over 70 percent of current Lifeline-recipient households by eliminating their wireless providers from the program, leaving less affordable and fewer Lifeline options, while making it more difficult for the companies trying to serve Lifeline customers. Instead of cutting the program, we should ensure Lifeline reaches more Americans in need of access to communication services.

The last thing we should be doing is rolling back the policies that have brought connectivity to millions of Americans. We are requesting responses to the following, before the Commission conducts a vote on the future of Lifeline:

1. The December 1, 2017, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) provides no evidence, analysis, or data to support its assumption that the FCC's proposed changes to Lifeline will spur facilities-based broadband deployment and additional affordable services for low-income families. Provide any specific data, analysis, academic studies, economic reports, etc. that you relied on to support this assumption. Explain why the NPRM included no evidence or data to support this assumption.

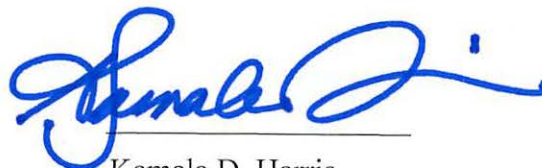
2. What is the FCC's plan for the millions of Americans that would lose service due to your actions to cut the Lifeline program?
3. How many Americans in total, broken down by state, would lose their current service provider under your proposal? How many Americans would be left without any provider offering Lifeline service?
4. How will you ensure the integrity of the comment record is intact, and that it will be taken into your decision-making process?
5. How does your proposal help to increase the already terrible connectivity situation in Puerto Rico after its devastation by recent hurricanes?
6. How does your proposal ensure connectivity/affect availability of Lifeline for the following groups (please provide current Lifeline participation statistics for each, where available):
 - a) Tribal members
 - b) Rural Americans
 - c) Low-income Americans
 - d) Veterans
 - e) Elderly populations

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



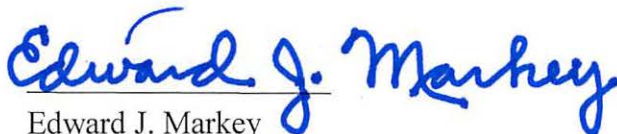
Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



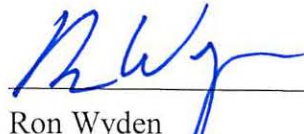
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



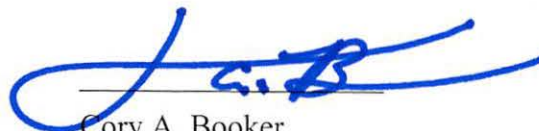
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Merkley:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

At the same time, I am deeply committed to ensuring that the Commission fulfills its obligation to be a responsible steward of the Universal Service Fund. It is critical to strengthen the Lifeline program’s efficacy and integrity by reducing the waste, fraud, and abuse that has run rampant in this program for the better part of a decade. For example, in response to a request for an investigation initiated by Senators Claire McCaskill and Rob Portman, the Government Accountability Office discovered 1,234,929 Lifeline subscribers who apparently were not eligible to participate in the program as well as 6,378 individuals who apparently enrolled or recertified after being reported as deceased. That limited sample alone constituted more than \$137 million in abuse each year. That’s money that could be better spent building out broadband in low-income neighborhoods and making broadband more affordable for low-income families and veterans living in rural America, in territories like Puerto Rico, and on Tribal lands.

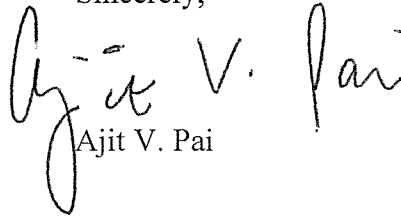
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companies. And that will be our lodestar as we move forward to ensure that unscrupulous companies stop abusing this important program.

I likewise agree with you on the importance of universal service programs in Puerto Rico. That's why the agency waived Lifeline's recertification and non-usage rules for Puerto Rican residents in the hurricane's aftermath—to ensure that subscribers would not lose their Lifeline service at a time when they needed it most. And that's why the Commission has taken several steps to restore network facilities on the island. Just this past May, the Commission adopted my proposal to create the Uniendo a Puerto Rico Fund and Connect USVI Fund, in order to accelerate the restoration of communications networks damaged and destroyed on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands during the 2017 hurricane season. In the near term, the order provides more than \$64.2 million in additional funding this year to make sure network recovery continues in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In the accompanying notice, we look toward the long term and propose providing \$890 million in funding to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to enhance connectivity and help future-proof the territories' networks. Moving forward with the efforts outlined in the notice will help ensure that funding is fiscally responsible and enables as many people as possible in the territories to benefit from fixed and mobile communications. And these networks will be rebuilt by facilities-based carriers who are committed to investing in the territories (several of whom I visited shortly after Hurricanes Irma and Maria), not wireless resellers.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ajit" being the most prominent part, followed by "V." and "Pai".

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Bernard Sanders
United States Senate
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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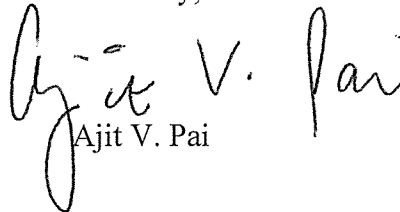
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Edward J. Markey
United States Senate
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Markey:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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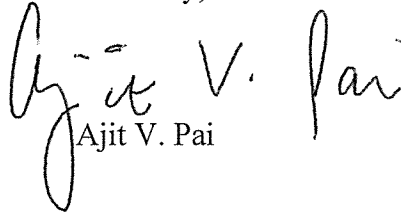
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Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
United States Senate
B40B Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Harris:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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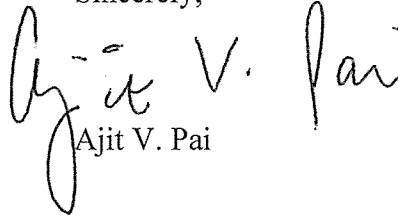
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
478 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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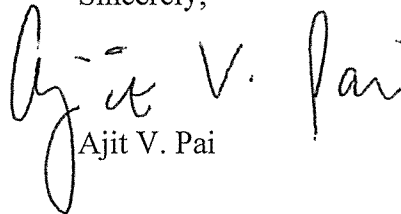
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Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wyden:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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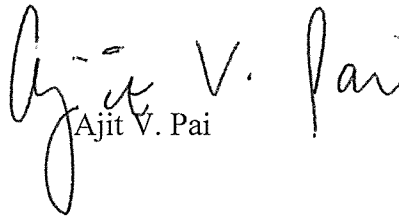
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal:

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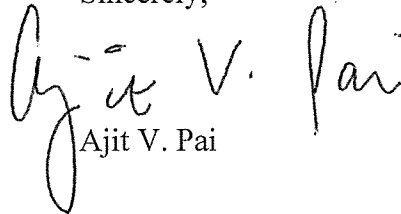
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I likewise agree with you on the importance of universal service programs in Puerto Rico. That's why the agency waived Lifeline's recertification and non-usage rules for Puerto Rican residents in the hurricane's aftermath—to ensure that subscribers would not lose their Lifeline service at a time when they needed it most. And that's why the Commission has taken several steps to restore network facilities on the island. Just this past May, the Commission adopted my proposal to create the Uniendo a Puerto Rico Fund and Connect USVI Fund, in order to accelerate the restoration of communications networks damaged and destroyed on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands during the 2017 hurricane season. In the near term, the order provides more than \$64.2 million in additional funding this year to make sure network recovery continues in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In the accompanying notice, we look toward the long term and propose providing \$890 million in funding to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to enhance connectivity and help future-proof the territories' networks. Moving forward with the efforts outlined in the notice will help ensure that funding is fiscally responsible and enables as many people as possible in the territories to benefit from fixed and mobile communications. And these networks will be rebuilt by facilities-based carriers who are committed to investing in the territories (several of whom I visited shortly after Hurricanes Irma and Maria), not wireless resellers.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ajit" being the most prominent part, followed by "V." and "Pai".

Ajit V. Pai



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Durbin:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

At the same time, I am deeply committed to ensuring that the Commission fulfills its obligation to be a responsible steward of the Universal Service Fund. It is critical to strengthen the Lifeline program’s efficacy and integrity by reducing the waste, fraud, and abuse that has run rampant in this program for the better part of a decade. For example, in response to a request for an investigation initiated by Senators Claire McCaskill and Rob Portman, the Government Accountability Office discovered 1,234,929 Lifeline subscribers who apparently were not eligible to participate in the program as well as 6,378 individuals who apparently enrolled or recertified after being reported as deceased. That limited sample alone constituted more than \$137 million in abuse each year. That’s money that could be better spent building out broadband in low-income neighborhoods and making broadband more affordable for low-income families and veterans living in rural America, in territories like Puerto Rico, and on Tribal lands.

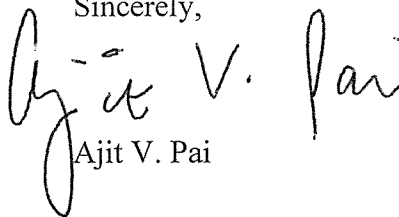
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Warren:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only “mobile” broadband, which don’t help consumers who lack home broadband or aren’t otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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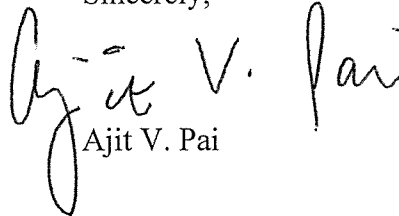
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

August 10, 2018

The Honorable Cory Booker
United States Senate
359 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Booker:

Thank you for your letter arguing that the most vulnerable people in our country must have access to affordable communications. I agree with you. I am committed to bridging the digital divide, and like you, I believe the Lifeline program can help do just that.

That is why the Commission adopted the *2017 Lifeline Reform Order*, which seeks to focus Lifeline support where it is most needed and incentivize investment in networks that enable 21st-century connectivity for all Americans. The *Order* increased consumer choice by eliminating restrictions that barred Lifeline consumers from changing Lifeline providers for a year. And it protected consumers by barring low-quality services that offered mobile broadband in theory but failed to do so in practice (such as Wi-Fi-only "mobile" broadband, which don't help consumers who lack home broadband or aren't otherwise near a Wi-Fi hotspot like a coffee shop).

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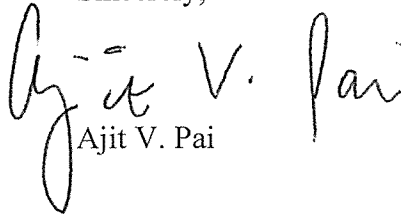
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